

Winter Driving Safety Tips

Ottumwa is forecasted to experience its first snow storm of the winter season this week. In order to reduce potential accidents and injuries, the Police Department would like to offer the following winter driving safety tips:

- Be aware of the weather forecast in your area and where you are traveling to. If snow or ice is predicted, make plans to leave early or arrive later. If you can move a night trip to daylight hours, do so. Not only is visibility better, but if your vehicle is stalled, you are more likely to receive prompt assistance during the daytime.
- Be sure to prepare your vehicle for winter driving, including making sure windshield wiper blades are working properly; placing an ice scraper/snow brush in your vehicle; having the anti-freeze/coolant tested for the correct level; installing snow tires if necessary and ensuring tires are inflated properly; keeping your gas tank at least half full at all times; and, adding extra weight to in the trunk of rear-wheel drive vehicles.
- Try to remove ice and snow from your shoes before getting in your vehicle. As they melt, they create moisture build-up, causing windows to fog on the inside. You can reduce this fogging by turning the air recirculation switch to the OFF position. This brings in drier, fresh air. You can also run your air conditioner which serves as a dehumidifier for a few minutes.
- Adjust head rests. Rear-end collisions are common in winter driving and a properly-adjusted head rest can prevent or reduce neck injuries.
- Before you shift into gear, plan the best route to your destination. Avoid hills, high congestion areas and bridges if possible.
- Although your radio can provide helpful traffic information, it can also be a distraction for some drivers. Since driving is more a mental skill than a physical skill, you may want to keep it turned off.
- Don't use a cellular phone when driving on ice or snow. Even if you have a hands-free model, you need to concentrate on driving, not on a telephone conversation.
- Drive slowly and remember that posted speed limits identify the maximum speed allowed when weather conditions are ideal. Law enforcement agencies can write citations to motorists driving the posted speed limit if weather conditions warrant a slower speed.
- Be more alert to the actions of other drivers.
- Anticipate cars coming from side streets and put extra distance between your vehicle and the one in front of you. If someone is too close behind you, don't speed up; slow down or let them go around you.
- To make sure other drivers see you, always drive with your lights on. At night, in fog and heavy snow conditions, low beams may be more effective than high beams.
- Keep both hands on the wheel and keep the wheel pointed where you want your car to go. While it may sound overly simple, it could help you in a skid.
- While manual transmissions may provide greater control to assist with braking, be careful when using downshifting as a way to slow the vehicle. Gear changes, particularly abrupt ones, can upset a vehicle's balance and cause a skid to occur, especially in turns.

...and finally, both drivers and passengers should always use their seatbelts, both lap and shoulder straps. Remember, buckling up is not just a good idea – it's the law!